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Educational Television Series 1968-69

Teachers' Guide

DEPT. OF EDUCATION
HISTORICAL COLLECTION

Professional Development

Creative English

Educational Television Branch
ONTARIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
1670 Bayview Avenue, Toronto 17

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CREATIVE ENGLISH

3 programs, 20 minutes each.

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INTRODUCTION

How do we help children at the Junior and Intermediate levels to express their ideas and emotions in creative ways? A child in the Primary grades seems to consider music and dancing and the rhythm of poetry as a natural way of responding to experience. But older children are more reticent; they are bound by inhibitions, and sometimes seem incapable of any kind of creative expression.

"The whole child" has become a cliché of education, but the validity of the term and its implications for teaching are hardly a matter for debate. Few would argue now that the "three R's", or that part of the curriculum devoted to intellectual growth, constitute the total education of the child. There is another whole area of growth which is dependent upon a kind of knowledge less tangible than that offered by the acquiring of skills or the grasping of concepts. In a sense it is a knowledge of one's emotional and spiritual self. The development of this knowledge adds depth and meaning to one's life; it widens the outlook, sharpens the senses, and provides standards of taste that are personally satisfying. In short, it releases the potential of the child, helps him to a richer life, and makes him a more interesting person.

And the heart of it all is the creative impulse which, we are told, lies within us all. But this impulse does not always flower easily. Just as children need help in learning to read or grasp mathematical concepts, so they require our assistance in developing a creative and imaginative freedom which allows them to express this side of their nature. And for older children who seem to be subject to all kinds of inhibiting pressures, this assistance is particularly necessary. The inhibiting pressures are usually negative; for example, these children may lack meaningful experience, fail to recognize that they have ideas and emotions to express, and suffer the imposition of arbitrary standards of taste which discourage their own creative efforts, and very often they suffer from an utter neglect of this area of growth.

These programs are concerned with one aspect of the total pedagogical problem discussed in this general introduction. How do we encourage children to respond to experience in a poetic form? There is no single answer to this question. But many teachers have found that with skilful guidance even the most reluctant of young adolescents finds himself cheerfully composing poetry of an original and powerful quality.

Miss Irene Adams, Principal and Grade 8 teacher at St. Elizabeth Separate School in Etobicoke, and Miss Maureen Brady, a teacher of Grade 6 pupils in the same school illustrate this kind of work and the techniques employed. Both teachers have been remarkably successful in creating the kind of atmosphere where poetry has a recognized and secure place in the lives of the children. They read poetry, talk about it, and write it. They live with it in a comfortable companionship, accepting it as a normal outlet for the expression of their ideas.

These programs are meant to describe what happens in these classrooms and to try to answer some of the questions which might be asked about this aspect of the curriculum. Their ultimate purpose is to suggest to teachers ways of helping children of all ages to express their thoughts in creative activities, of which the writing of poetry is one, and that if teachers and children work together in a positive manner, the creative potential can be transformed into action.

PROGRAM I

PROVOCATION TO POETRY

In this program we observe how Miss Adams and Miss Brady deal with the basic problem of helping children to use poetry as a natural outlet for their ideas and emotions. Scenes from the classrooms of these two teachers are combined with narrative to suggest some answers to this problem. A number of basic points are brought out:

- teacher assignment of themes is not likely to provoke a lively response from the children.
- the impulse or desire to write poetry must come from within; the child will respond to an experience which has moved or excited him, and poetry based upon this response will be genuine. In other words, the motivation must be provided by things that are important to the child.
- children must be taught that they all have something to write about. There is no body of "respectable" poetic themes. If their ideas are important to them, no matter how trivial or mundane they may seem, they are the stuff from which poetry can be made.
- children are individuals and their need for creative outlets will vary. It may also be that some are not ready to write poetry and that another type of creative activity will be more satisfying for them.
- a teacher can encourage children to read poetry, to talk about it among themselves, and to relate poetry to other types of creative activity.

notes

PROGRAM 2

POETIC RESPONSE

What kind of poetry do children write? In this program we explore the themes which children choose, and with the help of the two teachers, examine more closely the question of motivation.

The following points are illustrated:

- the themes chosen by the children are as varied as the children themselves.
- children often use poetry as a way of articulating very strong but suppressed feelings. In other words, once they have accepted that they *can* write poetry, they find it offers a satisfying release for their private sorrows or delights or resentments.
- through the writing of poetry children learn to distinguish poetry from prose. They also discover that prose can very often be quite poetic, and vice versa.
- the writing of poetry creates an interest in poetry as such. Children will begin to search out poetry, to read material on themes similar to those they have written about, and eventually to talk about poetry with each other and with the teacher.
- methods of composition may vary. Some find it easier to work in groups; some try another type of creative activity, such as picture-making, to clarify their ideas; some read and discuss other poetry before tackling their own. The teacher allows each child to approach the writing of poetry in the way that he finds most satisfying.
- children may be pleased with their own poems, and when they are they should be given the chance to display them. Ordinarily, this display would take the form of public reading and discussion. However, the child should not be forced to display his work.

notes

PROGRAM 3

POETRY IS GROWTH

This program is concerned with the relationship between growth and the writing of poetry. What is the teacher's role in establishing this relationship? Is it enough simply to let the children write poetry, or should we consciously help him to improve his techniques? Should we grade and mark his poems? Should we provide children with a basic knowledge of the poetic structures and forms? It is sometimes difficult for us as teachers to remember that growth can take place without our active intervention and guidance. If we are right, what kind of guidance should we provide? And what are the legitimate occasions for intervention?

Miss Adams and Miss Brady have strong views on these matters. And, as in the first two programs, scenes from their classroom work are reinforced by interviews and narration.

Some of their views are outlined below:

- our first aim is to get the children to write. Premature insistence on standards and on form will limit their freedom in this respect and perhaps discourage them. The teacher should put away her red marking pencil, and steer clear of any type of formal evaluation.
- a poem is good if the writer is satisfied with it, if it pleases him as a statement of what he says.
- one of the best ways to help a child improve his poetry is to let him read a great deal of poetry. In a short time he becomes conscious of the need to improve his own writing. He compares his own with the poetry he has read, and he begins to edit, change, and improve it. As he writes and reads he develops standards of poetic quality and taste.
- at this point the child may be ready for some help so that he can be made aware of the various poetic forms and structures. He may find his lack of knowledge limits his freedom to write. But even now he wants no arid instruction in rhyme, scansion, etc. What he wants to know is related to his purpose; he tries, for instance, to express his ideas in four-line stanzas with alternate rhyming lines, and somehow it does not seem right. The teacher may suggest that he study some other poetic forms, or the whole problem may be discussed with the other children in the class.

notes

Scheduling for this series can be found in the monthly ETVO SCHEDULE sent to all teachers. For long-term planning, reference can be made to the ETV Schedule (Calendar), which lists programming from October to June and was mailed to all teachers. However, it is most important to check the monthly ETVO SCHEDULE for the last minute changes always involved in extensive programming.

CREATIVE ENGLISH